

Purpose of Rule: Rule 20 covers what players should do when they have questions about the Rules during a round, including the procedures (which differ in match play and stroke play) allowing a player to protect the right to get a ruling at a later time.

The Rule also covers the role of referees who are authorized to decide questions of fact and apply the Rules. Rulings from a referee or the Committee are binding on all players.

20

Resolving Rules Issues During Round; Rulings by Referee and Committee

20.1

Resolving Rules Issues During Round

20.1a

Players Must Avoid Unreasonable Delay

Players must not unreasonably delay play when seeking help with the Rules during a round:

- If a referee or the Committee is not available in a reasonable time to help with a Rules issue, the player must decide what to do and play on.
- The player may protect their rights by asking for a ruling in match play (see Rule 20.1b(2)) or by playing two balls in stroke play (see Rule 20.1c(3)).

20.1b

Rules Issues in Match Play

(1) Deciding Issues by Agreement. During a round, the players in a match may agree how to decide a Rules issue:

- The agreed outcome is conclusive even if it turns out to have been wrong under the Rules, so long

as the players did not agree to ignore any Rule or penalty they knew applied (see [Rule 1.3b\(1\)](#)).

- **But** if a [referee](#) is assigned to the match, the [referee](#) must rule on any issue that comes to their attention in time (see Rule 20.1b(2)) and the players must follow that ruling.

In the absence of a [referee](#), if players do not agree or have doubt about how the Rules apply, either player may request a ruling under Rule 20.1b(2).

(2) Ruling Request Made Before Result of Match Is Final. When a player wants a [referee](#) or the [Committee](#) to decide how to apply the Rules to their own play or the [opponent's](#) play, the player may make a request for a ruling.

If a [referee](#) or the [Committee](#) is not available in a reasonable time, the player may make the request for a ruling by notifying the [opponent](#) that a later ruling will be sought when a [referee](#) or the [Committee](#) becomes available.

If a player makes a request for a ruling before the result of the match is final:

- A ruling will be given only if the request is made in time, which depends on when the player becomes aware of the facts creating the Rules issue:
 - When Player Becomes Aware of the Facts Before Either Player Starts the Final Hole of the Match. When the player becomes aware of the facts, the ruling request must be made before either player makes a [stroke](#) to begin another [hole](#).
 - When Player Becomes Aware of the Facts During or After Completion of the Final Hole of the Match. The ruling request must be made before the result of the match is final (see [Rule 3.2a\(5\)](#)).
- If the player does not make the request in this time, a ruling will not be given by a [referee](#) or the [Committee](#) and the result of the hole(s) in question will stand even if the Rules were applied in the wrong way.

If the player requests a ruling about an earlier hole, a ruling will be given only if all three of these apply:

- The [opponent](#) breached [Rule 3.2d\(1\)](#) (giving wrong number of strokes taken) or [Rule 3.2d\(2\)](#) (failing to tell the player about a penalty),

- The request is based on facts the player was not aware of before either player made a stroke to begin the hole being played or, if between holes, the hole just completed, and
- After becoming aware of these facts, the player makes a request for a ruling in time (as set out above).

(3) Ruling Request Made After Result of Match Is Final. When a player makes a request for a ruling after the result of the match is final:

- The Committee will give the player a ruling only if both of these apply:
 - The request is based on facts the player was not aware of before the result of the match was final, and
 - The opponent breached Rule 3.2d(1) (giving wrong number of strokes taken) or Rule 3.2d(2) (failing to tell the player about a penalty) and knew of the breach before the result of the match was final.
- There is no time limit on giving such a ruling.

(4) No Right to Play Two Balls. A player who is uncertain about the right procedure in a match is not allowed to play out the hole with two balls. That procedure applies only in stroke play (see Rule 20.1c).

20.1c

Rules Issues in Stroke Play

(1) No Right to Decide Rules Issues by Agreement. If a referee or the Committee is not available in a reasonable time to help with a Rules issue:

- The players are encouraged to help each other in applying the Rules, **but** they have no right to decide a Rules issue by agreement and any such agreement they may reach is not binding on any player, a referee or the Committee.
- A player should raise any Rules issues with the Committee before returning their scorecard.

(2) Players Should Protect Other Players in the Competition. To protect the interests of all other

players:

- If a player knows or believes that another player has breached or might have breached the Rules and that the other player does not recognize or is ignoring this, the player should tell the other player, the player's marker, a referee or the Committee.
- This should be done promptly after the player becomes aware of the issue, and no later than before the other player returns their scorecard unless it is not possible to do so.

If the player fails to do so, the Committee may disqualify the player under Rule 1.2a if it decides that this was serious misconduct contrary to the spirit of the game.

(3) Playing Two Balls When Uncertain What to Do. A player who is uncertain about the right procedure while playing a hole may complete the hole with two balls without penalty:

- The player must decide to play two balls after the uncertain situation arises and before making a stroke.
- The player should choose which ball will count if the Rules allow the procedure used for that ball, by announcing that choice to their marker or to another player before making a stroke.
- If the player does not choose in time, the ball played first is treated as the ball chosen by default.
- The player must report the facts of the situation to the Committee before returning the scorecard, even if the player scores the same with both balls. The player is **disqualified** if they fail to do so.
- If the player made a stroke before deciding to play a second ball:
 - This Rule does not apply at all and the score that counts is the score with the ball played before the player decided to play the second ball.
 - **But** the player gets no penalty for playing the second ball.

A second ball played under this Rule is not the same as a provisional ball under Rule 18.3.

(4) Committee Decision on Score for Hole. When a player plays two balls under (3), the Committee will decide the player's score for the hole in this way:

- The score with the ball chosen (whether by the player or by default) counts if the Rules allow the procedure used for that ball.

- If the Rules do not allow the procedure used for that ball, the score with the other ball played counts if the Rules allow the procedure used for that other ball.
- If the Rules do not allow the procedures used for each of the two balls, the score with the ball chosen (whether by the player or by default) counts unless there was a serious breach in playing that ball from a wrong place, in which case the score with the other ball counts.
- If there was a serious breach in playing each ball from a wrong place, the player is **disqualified**.
- All strokes with the ball that does not count (including strokes made and any penalty strokes solely from playing that ball) do not count in the player's score for the hole.

“Rules allow the procedure used” means that either: (a) the original ball was played as it lies and play was allowed from there, or (b) the ball that was played was put in play under the right procedure, in the right way and in the right place under the Rules.

20.2

Rulings on Issues Under the Rules

20.2a

Rulings by Referee

A referee is an official named by the Committee to decide questions of fact and apply the Rules. The referee may get the Committee's help before making a ruling.

A referee's ruling on the facts or how the Rules apply must be followed by the player.

A player has no right to appeal a referee's ruling to the Committee, but after a ruling has been made, the referee may:

- Get a second opinion from another referee, or
- Refer a ruling to the Committee for review,

but is not required to do so.

A referee's decision is final, so if a referee authorizes a player to breach a Rule in error, the player will not be penalized. **But** for when a wrong ruling by a referee or the Committee will be corrected, see Rule 20.2d.

20.2b

Rulings by Committee

When there is no referee to give a ruling or when a referee refers a ruling to the Committee:

- The ruling will be given by the Committee, and
- The Committee's ruling is final.

If the Committee cannot reach a decision, it may refer the issue to the Rules of Golf Committee of The R&A, whose decision is final.

20.2c

Applying “Naked Eye” Standard When Using Video Evidence

When the Committee is deciding questions of fact in making a ruling, the use of video evidence is limited by the “naked eye” standard:

- If the facts shown on the video could not reasonably have been seen with the naked eye, that video evidence will be disregarded even if it indicates a breach of the Rules.
- **But** even where video evidence is disregarded under the “naked eye” standard, a breach of the Rules will still be found if the player was otherwise aware of facts establishing a breach (such as where the player felt the club touch sand in a bunker even though that could not be seen by the naked eye).

20.2d

Wrong Rulings and Administrative Mistakes

(1) Wrong Rulings. A wrong ruling has occurred when a referee or the Committee has attempted to apply the Rules but has done so incorrectly. Examples of wrong rulings include:

- Applying a wrong penalty or failing to apply a penalty,
- Applying a Rule that does not apply or does not exist, and
- Misinterpreting a Rule and applying it incorrectly.

If a ruling by a referee or the Committee is later found to be wrong, the ruling will be corrected if possible under the Rules. If it is too late to do so, the wrong ruling stands.

If a player takes an action in breach of a Rule based on a reasonable misunderstanding of a referee's or Committee's instruction during a round or while play is stopped under Rule 5.7a (such as lifting a ball in play when not allowed under the Rules), there is no penalty and the instruction is treated like a wrong ruling.

See Committee Procedures, Section 6C (what the Committee should do when there has been a wrong ruling).

(2) Administrative Mistakes. An administrative mistake is a procedural error in relation to the administration of the competition and there is no time limit for correcting such a mistake, even after the result of a match is final or a stroke-play competition has closed. An administrative mistake is different to a wrong ruling. Examples of administrative mistakes include:

- Miscalculating the result of a tie in stroke play,
- Miscalculating a handicap resulting in the wrong player winning the competition, and
- Awarding a prize to the wrong player after failing to post the winner's score.

In these situations, the mistake should be corrected and the results of the competition should be amended accordingly.

20.2e

Disqualifying Players After Result of Match or Competition Is Final

(1) Match Play. There is no time limit on disqualifying a player under [Rule 1.2](#) (serious misconduct) or [Rule 1.3b\(1\)](#) (deliberately failing to apply a penalty, or agreeing with another player to ignore any Rule or penalty they know applies).

This may be done even after the result of the match is final (see [Rule 3.2a\(5\)](#)).

For when the Committee will give a ruling when a request is made after the result of the match is final, see [Rule 20.1b\(3\)](#).

(2) Stroke Play. Normally, a penalty must not be added or corrected after a stroke-play competition has closed, which is:

- When the result becomes final in the way set by the Committee, or
- In stroke-play qualifying followed by match play, when the player has teed off to start their first match.

But a player must be **disqualified** even after the competition is closed if they:

- Returned a score for any hole lower than actually taken. **Except** the player is not disqualified if the reason for the lower score is the exclusion of one or more penalty strokes that they did not know about before the competition closed (see [Rule 3.3b\(3\)](#)),
- Knew before the competition had closed that they were in breach of any other Rule with a penalty of disqualification, or
- Agreed with another player to ignore any Rule or penalty they knew applied (see [Rule 1.3b\(1\)](#)).

The Committee may also disqualify a player under [Rule 1.2](#) (serious misconduct) after the competition has closed.

20.2f

Ineligible Player

There is no time limit for correcting the results of a competition when a player who has competed is found to be ineligible according to the Terms of the Competition. This applies even after the result of a match is final or after a stroke-play competition has closed.

In these circumstances, the player is treated as if they had not entered the competition, as opposed to being disqualified, and the results are amended accordingly.

20.3

Situations Not Covered by the Rules

Any situation not covered by the Rules should be decided by the Committee:

- Considering all the circumstances, and
- Treating the situation in a way that is reasonable, fair and consistent with how similar situations are treated under the Rules.